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ABSTRACT

This second chapter in "Elementary School Counseling in a Changing World" covers a variety of topics related to helping children and parents function effectively within changing family situations. Four journal articles are included in the chapter. "A Multimodal Intervention for Group Counseling with Children of Divorce" by Margaret Crosbie-Burnett and Laurel Newcomer presents both classroom and small-group components of an eight-session model of group intervention for children of divorce. "A Parent Group Training Program for Single Parents" by Nancy Cunningham and Joe Brown outlines a group training program in parenting skills for single parents that emphasizes parent-child communication, child management, and problem-solving skills. "Helping Latchkey Children: A Group Guidance Approach" by Michael Bundy and Judith Boser describes "Being in Charge," a six-session guidance unit designed to provide intermediate and middle-grade children with the skills to cope more effectively with taking care of themselves while home alone. "Strategic Interventions with Children of Single-Parent Families" by Wade Lewis focuses on the school-related problems of children of single-parent families, presents a way of conceptualizing such problems from a family systems perspective, and describes examples of interventions based on strategic family therapy. The chapter concludes with a set of issues for elementary school counselors to consider about a world of changing families. (NB)

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CHAPTER 2

A WORLD OF CHANGING FAMILIES

The so-called traditional family has virtually disappeared in America. Divorce and single parent homes are a fact of life confronting children. Divorce occurs in one of every two marriages and estimates suggest that 80% of the students in some schools come from broken homes. This chapter on divorce and single parent homes helps elementary school counselors understand the effects of changing family structures and suggests ways to promote child growth and development within the context of family change.

Chapter 2 covers a variety of topics related to helping children and parents function effectively within changing family situations. These topics include:

1. Multimodal group counseling for children
2. Group training for single parents
3. Group guidance for latchkey children
4. Counseling interventions with children from single parent families

The articles in Chapter 2 recognize that elementary school counselors must often use broad based approaches for intervening with children who face difficult family circumstances. When children experience divorce, for example, they must often learn new behaviors, examine changing feelings, deal with new sensations and images related to home and family, and cope with challenging new relationships within families. Elementary school counselors need to develop innovative approaches to help children and parents develop in a healthy fashion in spite of the ambiguity created by divorce and single parent families.

The 1990s promise to bring new challenges for elementary school counselors in the area of changing family structures. Counselors will probably

want to assume a larger role in preparing children to be responsible parents and family members in later adult life. Most counselors are presently reacting to changing families and helping children to cope. Counselors should assume a more proactive stance by collaborating with teachers in developing and implementing family education programs aimed at preventing some of the difficulties experienced in today's families. Chapter 2 provides a clear challenge for counselors to develop creative approaches in helping family members to work together productively.

A Multimodal Intervention for Group Counseling with Children of Divorce

Margaret Crosbie-Burnett
Laurel L. Newcomer

Increasing numbers of children are bringing divorce-related problems to school. Teachers, administrators, counselors and other support service professionals have begun to respond to this phenomenon in ways that go beyond individual counseling. Because of the large numbers of children who need support and guidance in coping with parental divorce, school counselors often choose a group format in which to address these children's needs. In response to this trend, a variety of models of group counseling for children of divorce can be found in the recent literature. Unfortunately, few of these models included any evaluation measures and even fewer tested the group's effectiveness with an experimental design.

Green's (1978) multimodal model of group intervention for children of divorce, however, has been shown to be successful in changing children's beliefs and attitudes about divorce and in increasing competent behaviors (Anderson, Kinney, & Gerler, 1984). A multimodal approach gives the counselor a framework by which to systematically address the many elements of a child's life that may be affected by parental divorce, as well as the interrelationships between those elements. The elements include health, emotions, self-concept, learning and school performance, interpersonal relationships, and behaviors. Because some children may be experiencing problems in some element of their lives more than other elements, the model lends itself to individualized treatment for each child. Even in a group setting, some individualization is possible. In addition, children who are excelling in an element can serve as role models for children who are having problems in that part of their lives. For a complete explanation of multimodal therapy with children, see Keat (1974, 1979) and Keat, Boswell, and Green (1980); for reviews of multimodal counseling, see Gerler (1981, 1982).

The model presented below is a modification and expansion of Green (1978) with minor contributions from models reported by Hammond (1981) and Wilkinson and Bleck (1977). Green's model is modified in the following ways: (a) The objectives and modes for each session are included, allowing the counselor to identify quickly the areas of concern that the session addresses and the mode used to address them. This gives the counselor more flexibility because

the counselor can use the session and activities that are most relevant to the group at that particular time. For example, a group may have greater immediate needs for emotion-related activities at a particular time than for behavioral problem-solving activities. (b) The present model is appropriate for use in nearly all primary grades and middle school. Because the Green model places heavy emphasis on the reading of *The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce* (Gardner, 1970), it is limited to the upper primary grades and middle school because of the reading level required. (c) Divorce-related materials that have been developed since the publication of the Green model are integrated. (d) In addition to the group counseling model, the model presented here is enriched by the inclusion of a classroom component to educate all children about parental divorce and family change. The use of both a classroom component and a small group component is consistent with the developmental, preventive approach to school guidance. The classroom component also provides children with the opportunity to refer themselves to the small group.

Both the classroom and the small-group components of the model are described below. This model has been tested in an experimental study with sixth graders (Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer, in press); it was found to significantly reduce depression as measured by the Reynolds Depression Inventory (Reynolds, 1987) and significantly improve attitudes and beliefs about parental divorce as measured by the Children's Beliefs about Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg, 1987) and some aspects of self-concept as measured by the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985). In addition, counselors have informally reported success in using the model repeatedly with elementary school children of varying ages.

Family Change: A Classroom Guidance Activity

Objectives:

1. To help children of parental divorce by reframing divorce as one form of family change.
2. To suggest various coping strategies for adjusting to change.
3. To provide an opportunity for children to sign up for small group work on divorce-related issues.

Discussion

Types of Families. At least 1 hour should be allowed for the classroom guidance activity. The discussion begins with brainstorming and definitions of the various

types of families, including intact/nuclear, single-parent, stepparent, foster, adopted, extended, communal, and any others that the children identify. Students discuss similarities and differences between family types.

Family Change. Counselors explain that all families experience change over time. The counselor and children identify the many situations in which families change developmentally, including births, deaths, separation and divorce, remarriage, and children growing up and leaving home. Counselors may invite children to talk about examples of change in their own families.

Adjustment to Change. Counselors need to explain that when families change, people have to learn how to adjust. Counselors may invite children to talk about how they have adjusted to change in their families or other changes, like changing schools. Then the class discusses the kinds of coping mechanisms that children could try if they are having problems adjusting to change. Common suggestions include the following: (a) *talking* with teachers, parents, friends, counselors, siblings, and other adults; (b) *reading* books about the changes they are experiencing; and (c) *joining* a group with other children with similar experiences.

Introduction To Small Group

Counselors explain that a group for children whose parents have separated or divorced will meet for 8 weeks, once a week, for 1 period, and that the purpose of the group will be to talk about their experiences of living in a divorced family. Then counselors ask for questions about the group. When giving a piece of paper to each child, the counselor directs the students to write their names and indicate "yes" if they would like to join the group and "no" if they do not want to do so. It is important that *all* children return the sign-up sheets so that classmates cannot identify those who express interest in participating in the small group.

Closure

If time allows, the counselor asks the children what they learned from the lesson. Ethically, it is important that the counselor note children who appear distressed by the discussion of family change. If these children do not express interest in the small group, they can be contacted for individual counseling.

Group Counseling Intervention for Children of Separation and Divorce

Selections of Group Members

It is important to individually interview all potential group members, even those who are self-selected. In the interview, the counselor may give each child information about the format, goals, and typical activities of the group. The counselor may also ask the child about his or her interest in the group. At the end of the interview, if the child is still interested and the counselor judges the child to be appropriate for the group, the counselor directs the child to have a parent sign a parental permission slip. Children whose parent(s) has(have) remarried may be included if they appear to have unresolved concerns about the divorce and if the counselor wishes to have a more heterogeneous group.

Overview

Each session is composed of an opening Icebreaker Activity, a central Stimulus Activity, and a Closing Activity, which generally includes some form of homework. The objectives for each session and the mode of behavior to which the activities relate are included at the beginning of each session. The seven modes are organized by the acronym HELPING (Green, 1978). They are the following: H–Health, E–Emotions, L–Learning, P–Personal relationships, I–Interests or Image, N–Need-To-Know, and G–Guidance of Behaviors, Actions, and Consequences.

Session 1: Introduction and Getting to Know You

Objectives:

1. To allow children to become better acquainted.
2. To set rules and goals for the group.

Icebreaker: Name Game. Name tags: Each group member is given a 5" x 7" card and a marking pen. In the center of the card each child writes his or her name. In the upper right corner children write their favorite thing to do. In the upper left corner children write their favorite TV show and star. In the lower left corner children write their three favorite foods. In the lower right corner children write their favorite color. In the center, under the name, each child writes one word that describes him or her.

The children are then paired and spend a few minutes interviewing each other, using the cards as stimuli for questions. The group reassembles and each pair introduces themselves to the group.

Stimulus Activity: Group Goal Setting and Rule Setting. The counselor explains the purposes of the group:

> We are here to privately share all we can about divorce. It is something that many children experience. In fact, everyone in the group has parents that are divorced. Some of the things we'll talk about are what divorce means, how it makes us feel, what we can do about those feelings, ways we can learn from it, what is going on with the people in our lives as we experience divorce, how we see ourselves, what we think or tell ourselves about divorce, and problems that we are having because of divorce. I'd like to talk about what you want out of this group, because it is your group. Let's go around and say what each one of us would like to get out of this group and I'll write down your goals so we can try to cover them all in our 8 weeks together.

The group then mutually decides on goals; each child can contribute personally. Setting group goals encourages commitment and involvement of all the members toward open sharing and growth.

The counselor helps the group identify group rules. The rules might include the following: (a) Confidentiality; (b) Listening to the person speaking; (c) The right to pass up your turn to talk; and (d) No put-downs.

Closing. Counselors explain that in future sessions the leader will give the children something to think about or practice for the next session, and then say, "For next week think about the goals and rules we have set and decide if there's something you would like to add."

Session 2: Divorce and Feelings

Objectives:

1. To help children handle personal relationships, especially within the family.
2. To help children clarify, recognize, and understand feelings and emotions pertaining to divorce.

Modes:

1. Personal relationships.
2. Emotions.

Introduction. The counselor reviews goals and rules and adds any goals or rules that the children generated during the week.

Icebreaker: The House My Family Lives In. The counselor shows the children a drawing of their family that was made prior to the session. The drawing of the family members should be divided into house shapes to illustrate the

different homes in which they live. For example, one might draw a mother in one house shape where she lives alone, siblings and their families in separate house shapes, a daughter in a house shape to represent the apartment she lives in with her roommates, and a spouse, self, and other children in another house shape. The counselor describes his or her picture to the group and then asks the children to draw house shapes and family members to show where members of their families live. After the drawings are finished, the counselor lets the children share their drawings and name their family members in each house.

Summing-Up Questions. Is someone still in your family if they live in a different home? Can you love someone who lives in a different house just as much as someone who lives with you? Have you ever thought about living with your other parent?

Stimulus Activity: Creating "Feeling Gauges." The counselor explains to children that people react to divorce with various feelings: sad, angry, scared, or unhappy. Children are encouraged to identify other feelings. The counselor reads relevant sections of *The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce* (Gardner, 1970). Using the pictures as discussion facilitators, the group focuses on what divorce means and the feelings that children can have when parents divorce. Concurrent with that discussion, each child individually completes his or her personal set of five "Feeling Gauges"—figures that resemble thermometers with a circle on top. Thus, children can select the most important feelings they have experienced during the divorce process, write the feeling in the circle, and color in the intensity of the feeling (the higher up the thermometer the color is, the "hotter" the feeling).

Closing. The counselor asks the children to write down any feelings they have about their parents' divorce during the coming week and note the event that caused the feelings. The counselor explains that the children will be invited to share these at the next session.

Session 3: Divorce and the Feelings and Problems It Can Create

Objectives:

1. To continue identifying the feelings surrounding divorce.
2. To begin examining some of the problems it can create.

Modes:

1. Emotions.
2. Need-to-know.

Icebreaker. The counselor finishes the "Feeling Gauges" from the previous week if not completed and asks the children to discuss with the group the

feeling with which they most closely identify. The counselor asks them to discuss feelings they experienced during the week and the causes of them.

Stimulus Activity: Movie—"Tender Places." "Tender Places" is a play that was written by a 10-year-old boy whose parents had divorced (Films for Humanity, 1987). It provides an opportunity for the group to see that the problems they may have experienced in their families are not unique. An appropriate alternative is a filmstrip entitled "Understanding Changes in the Family: Not Together Anymore" (Guidance Associates, 1983). After the group views the movie or the filmstrip, the counselor leads a discussion along the following lines.

Closing. Discussion questions could include the following: Why did Eric get so mad when his father offered to buy him a dog if he would come to live with him? Why do you think Eric was so upset when his mother told him she was going to remarry? Do you think it's a good idea for kids to choose which parent to live with? What problems could that create? Why did Eric tell the elderly lady at the end that he didn't want to get a dog? Do you think it's worth the risk to love someone or something even if they sometimes disappoint you?

Session 4: Divorce and What to Do About It

Objective:

To help children learn how to confront and cope with feelings and problems specific to divorce.

Modes:

1. Health.
2. Guidance of actions, behaviors, and consequences.
3. Emotions.

Icebreaker. The counselor reviews briefly the film or filmstrip from the previous week. The counselor also makes a list of feelings and problems regarding divorce using the film or filmstrip as a starting point and expands the list from the children's personal experiences. Brainstorming possible solutions to these problems is also beneficial.

Stimulus Activity: Generating Coping Behaviors:

1. Using problems and feelings generated above in the Icebreaker activity, the counselor has the children complete the following sentence fragment: "When I feel angry, frustrated, unhappy (or any other emotion they wish to name), I can _____." The counselor helps the children list ideas that can help them feel better but will not cause problems or hurt anyone or anything. Constructive suggestions

would include listening to music, watching television, reading, walking the dog, running or jogging, playing a favorite sport, taking a warm bath or shower, singing, calling a friend, walking in the park or woods, or playing with friends.
2. Students role play one or two solutions that were brainstormed.
3. The counselor discusses the importance of children regulating their emotions and lives through proper sleep, daily exercise, and nutritional food. The counselor also points out that these may be new responsibilities they must attend to as a consequence of the divorce.

Closing. The counselor directs the children to practice during the week one of the coping behaviors that was discussed or role played in the session. The counselor also suggests that they practice telling themselves and another person how they feel once every day during the coming week.

Session 5: Talking About Divorce

Objectives:

1. To continue exploration of how to cope with feelings associated with divorce.
2. To begin thinking about choices and decisions about actions and behaviors.

Modes:

1. Emotions.
2. Guidance of actions, behaviors, and consequences.

Icebreaker. The counselor discusses the homework: "Who practiced a coping behavior that we talked about last week? What happened when you told someone how you felt? How did you feel when you did that?"

Stimulus Activity: Multimodal Game. The students play the "Family Happenings Game" (Boardman & Boardman, 1983) using the additional cards that pertain specifically to divorce. This is a multimodal game designed to encourage discussion, rehearsal, and role playing of various aspects of children's lives related to divorce. An alternative multimodal game is "The Acting, Feeling, Choosing Game" (Keat, 1978). While playing the game, it is helpful to continue developing the list of divorce-related problems and possible solutions. The counselor provides time to brainstorm, discuss, and role-play expression of feelings and other coping behaviors. The momentum and design of the game help motivate the children to confront some issues that may have been repressed previously. The game fosters attention to emotions, learning

about divorce, relations with others, positive images, the need-to-know (rational talk), and guidance of actions, behaviors, and consequences.

Closing. Children are given three blank cards to generate their own entries for the game.

Session 6: More About Divorce

Objectives:

1. To help children develop rational, correct thoughts regarding themselves and divorce.
2. To continue examining possible choices for behavior and actions.

Modes:

1. Personal relations, especially friends.
2. Image.
3. Need-to-know.
4. Guidance of actions and behaviors.

Icebreaker. The counselor has the children draw self-portraits. (The counselors should provide mirrors.) Children write positive, rational statements about themselves on the back of the portraits. Personal examples are helpful. Each child reads two or three of his or her statements to the group. Group members can add to each child's list. The counselor explains how positive images and positive thoughts of oneself can promote feeling good about oneself and letting others know that.

Stimulus Activity: Continuation of Multimodal Game. Students continue playing the multimodal game, but the cards the children developed in the previous week as starters for this session are used because they will generally reveal personally relevant situations and questions. The counselor encourages the children to explore pertinent issues in depth, and to brainstorm and practice problem-solving and coping skills.

Closing. Children continue to add to the list of positive self-statements on the back of their portraits. Each child tells someone else something he or she likes about himself or herself each day of the coming week.

Session 7: Clarifying Attitudes Toward Divorce

Objective:

To help children clarify their attitudes toward divorce and reduce irrational thoughts.

Modes:

1. Learning.
2. Personal relations, especially family and friends.
3. Need-to-know.

Icebreaker. Students discuss new additions to positive statements on the back of self-portraits. Students also discuss reactions to telling someone else qualities they like about themselves.

Stimulus Activity: "Quiz" on Beliefs and Attitudes About Divorce. Children number from 1 to 11 on a piece of paper or the counselor hands out a copy of the "quiz" below. Each sentence is read aloud as the children mark either "A" (agree) or "D" (disagree).

1. _____Once people marry they should never get a divorce.
2. _____Sometimes, when parents divorce, it is the children's fault.
3. _____Children from divorced families can be just as happy as children whose parents are married.
4. _____If children promised their divorced parents that they would be very good, they might be able to get them back together.
5. _____It is better for parents to divorce than to fight everyday.
6. _____A parent who does not live with the child can still love him/her very much.
7. _____All kids whose parents are divorced get into more trouble at school.
8. _____It is better not to tell anyone if your parents are divorced.
9. _____Stepparents are usually mean to children.
10. _____It may be good for the children to live half of their time with their dad and half of the time with their mother.
11. _____When parents divorce, it is a very difficult time for all families.

The counselor corrects any maladaptive beliefs and attitudes. The class discusses statements about which children disagree and statements in which there is much interest.

Closing. The counselor asks children to discuss with their parent(s) at least one item from the "quiz." The counselor also asks children to discuss with one friend one of the changes they have experienced due to their parents' divorce.

Session 8: Integrating the Modes and Group Closure

Objective:

To increase the positive ways in which the children think, act, and feel about their families.

Mode:

All seven modes of the acronym HELPING.

Icebreaker. Children are asked to discuss what it was like to talk about divorce with parents and friends. Each child draws a family shield—a shield that is divided into five sections by drawing a cross in the main area and a horizontal line near the bottom of the shield, making the lower area a fifth section. Children are directed to draw pictures or make statements related to the following topics in each of the five sections of the shield.

1. A positive thing or a good time in your family.
2. An unpleasant time you had with your family.
3. One way to cope with an unpleasant family experience.
4. Reasons why you think your parents got a divorce.
5. Something you would like to see happening to your family in the next year.

The counselor asks volunteers to share their family shields with the group.

Stimulus Activity. Each child is given a large six-pointed star design. Students fill the spaces using pictures, words, or symbols. The center of the star is for the child's image (I). The spaces in the points are for the following: Learning or school (L); Friends (P); Family (P); Feelings he or she has most of the time (E); A positive thought he or she keeps in his or her mind all the time (N); A behavior he or she enjoys doing or has gotten under control (G).

Children are asked to share their stars with the group. Ways of expressing that each child is a unique star are encouraged.

Closing. The group concludes with round robin statements of the following: I learned _____. I feel _____. I am _____. Divorce makes life different by _____. I wish I could _____. I think _____. A good thing that has happened is _____. Divorce is _____. I've changed by _____.

Children generate sentence stems if they desire. Ways in which their growth or change is apparent to others are also shared.

Conclusion

The model presented is a two-tiered developmental guidance unit on parental divorce. The classroom unit acquaints all children with divorce as a type of family change; the small group focuses on the needs of children who are coping with parental divorce. The use of a multimodal approach in the small group

allows each child to focus on the elements of his or her life that has been most affected by the divorce. This modification of the Green (1978) HELPING multimodal approach to group counseling children of divorce has been tested experimentally and found to have positive effects on depression, attitudes, and beliefs about parental divorce, and aspects of self-concept.

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A Parent Group Training Program for Single Parents

Nancy J. Cunningham
Joe H. Brown

This article outlines a group training program in parenting skills for single parents that emphasizes parent-child communication, child management, and problem-solving skills.

The number of single-parent families is rising rapidly. The largest single factor contributing to the increasing number of single-parent families is the growing rate of divorce (Porter & Chatelain, 1981). The number of children under 18 living in single-parent families doubled from 10% to approximately 20% in the 1970s (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). If this trend continues, approximately 45% of those children born today will spend at least 1 year living in a single-parent home. Although these data are alarming, they do not reveal the emotional turmoil and trauma that face many single parents.

There are a number of serious problems that confront the single-parent family. First, the absence of a spouse often places immediate financial responsibility on the single parent (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Such responsibility can be overwhelming as many single-parent families are headed by women who possess little formal education and who lack the necessary job skills to support their family financially (Cashion, 1982). Second, single parents are often isolated and lack an adequate emotional support system. For a variety of reasons (e.g., unwillingness to help and geographic distance) single parents often are unable to depend on relatives or in-laws to assist with child care. In addition, the pressure of coping with the family requires so much energy that the single parent has no time to build a support system with peers who have similar concerns.

A third problem is that single parents often lack confirmation from another adult in the home. In two-parent families, each parent can support the other's position. A single parent may already be feeling guilty because of the termination of the marriage. The parent may have difficulty when a child does not comply with the parent's rules (Blechman & Manning, 1975). Simple requests, such as household chores, often create conflicts unless the single parent's authority is confirmed by another adult. Without confirmation, the single parent often gives in to the child's position. Absence of confirmation often causes the single parent to have less authority in the family (Weltner, 1982).

The program described herein addresses these problems by providing parent training to single parents through groups. There are several advantages to teaching parenting skills to single parents in a group setting. First, because single parents are often isolated, the group provides support and assistance from other parents for solving problems (Rose, 1974). Second, the group provides positive feedback (e.g., validation) for the parent's role in the family. Third, the group contributes to parent effectiveness by exposing single parents to a variety of models of parenting behaviors available in the group. Finally, the group provides a safe environment where parents can try out new behaviors they have learned.

The Group Training Program

The purposes of the group training are to provide single mothers with a set of skills for working with young children and to provide a supportive environment where mothers can help each other solve problems with their children.

Population

The participants were 45 mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) who were referred by Family Service Workers, Department of Human Resources, Louisville, Kentucky. All the mothers referred to the program agreed to participate. The parents, 31 Black and 14 White mothers, ranged in age from 23 to 63 and had at least one child in the age range of 3 to 10.

Parent Group Trainers

The trainers were ten female staff members from Family Services Workers from the Department of Human Resources. Two Black and eight White workers participated. Each trainer received 12 hours of instruction in group leader and parent training by two faculty members from the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Louisville. Minimal performance (90%) on criterion tests ensured that each trainee had acquired the necessary skills to lead a parent group.

Training Materials

The training delivered to both the group leaders and the parents is outlined in three training manuals developed for use in the program. *Positive Parenting: Manual for Group Leaders* (Cunningham & Brown, 1979) was used to train the

social service staff in group leadership skills. The leaders were given 6 hours of training that focused on the following three skill clusters needed for effective group leadership:

1. *Structuring the Group*, including defining the task and setting expectations;
2. *Responding to Group Members*, including reflecting parent statements, summarizing parent statements, praising parent statements, and praising parents who are helping other parents; and
3. *Encouraging Group Members to Talk*, including prompting desired behavior, responding to undesired parent behavior, redirecting attention to parent statements, and redirecting attention to other parents.

The format for the presentation of each leadership skill included (a) definition of each skill, (b) steps in using the skill, (c) written examples, (d) videotape examples, and (e) written exercises. Review sections, which focused on each skill group and the combination of the three skill groups, included written exercises, videotape exercises, and role-play situations.

Group leaders were also given 6 hours of instruction in the skills they would teach parents. These skills, plus explicit instructions for running the groups, are included in *Positive Parenting: Trainer's Manual* (Brown & Cunningham, 1979a). The parent's manual, *Positive Parenting: Parent's Manual* (Brown & Cunningham, 1979b), is identical to the trainer's manual except for the omission of group leader instructions. The trainer's and parent's manuals include explanations and examples of each skill, written and discrimination exercises, scripts of the videotape examples, and directions for role playing.

In addition, homework forms were provided to encourage practice of the skills before the next group session. Problem sheets in the appendix of the manuals enabled participants to monitor two child problem behaviors daily over the course of training.

The Skill Groups

The parenting skills included in the manuals are clustered into three skill groups.

Skill Group I: Communicating with Your Child

This skill group focused on training parents to both listen to their children and respond in a manner that indicates that they had listened to what the child had communicated.

Skill 1: Encouraging Child Talk. Parents were taught to encourage their children to talk to them about problem areas. Specific training focused on establishing eye contact with the child and using encouraging words.

Skill 2: Responding to the Child. Parents were encouraged to recognize and respond to both the feeling and the content in their children's communication.

Skill Group II: Child Management

This skill group focused on teaching parents what to do in a situation where the child's behavior is a problem for the parent but not for the child.

Skill 3: Stating Directions. Parents were taught (a) when to give directions, (b) how to state directions clearly and positively, (c) how to specify conditions for performance, and (d) how to give praise for following directions.

Skill 4: Rewarding Children's Behavior. Parents were taught (a) how to identify effective reinforcers, (b) when to reinforce, and (c) how to pair reinforcement with praise.

Skill 5: Ignoring Child Misbehavior. Parents were taught to deal with certain problem behaviors through withdrawing reinforcement by either looking the other way or leaving the room.

Skill 6: Expressing Feelings about Child's Misbehavior. Parents were taught to (a) discriminate between the child and the child's misbehavior and (b) express disapproval of the child's misbehavior.

Skill 7: Removing the Child for Misbehavior. Parents were taught the proper procedure for using a time-out strategy when the child engages in harmful behavior or fails to follow parent directions.

Skill Group III: Problem Solving

This skill group focused on teaching parents what to do in a situation where both the parent and child consider something a problem. Parents were taught a logical six-step model for solving problems. It includes (a) identifying the problem, (b) generating alternative solutions, (c) evaluating the solutions, (d) deciding on the best solution, (e) implementing that solution, and (f) evaluating that solution.

Format and Content of Training

Thirty single mothers were assigned to five parent-training groups, with six members in each group. The other 15 single mothers served as a control group. They received regular services from their Family Service Workers but were not

involved in the parent training groups. The parent training groups met for 2 hours each week for 7 weeks in area churches. Each group was co-led by two family service workers. At the first meeting, parents signed a contract agreeing to attend all meetings and to complete quizzes and homework assignments. The parents were then asked to identify problem areas they were having with their children. Group leaders assisted parents in translating problems into specific behavioral terms. The problems were recorded on problem sheets at the back of the training manual and were tallied over the course of training.

The last half of the first session and the remaining six sessions focused on specific communication and problem-solving skills, as outlined in the training manual. The format for teaching each skill included (a) introduction of the parent-child communication or child management skill, (b) written discrimination exercise related to the skill, (c) videotape model of the skill by a parent and child, (d) discussion of the videotape, (e) written exercise requiring participants to produce examples of the skill, (f) behavioral rehearsal of the skill, and (g) discussion of the homework assignment related to the skill.

Evaluation Measures

Outcome Measures

Three primary outcome measures were used to assess changes in parent behavior during training. The *Handling Problems Knowledge Test* measured the parents' knowledge of parent-child communication and management skills. This pre-post test of information consisted of 18 multiple-choice items. The parents were required to choose the technique that was most appropriate in a particular parent-child interaction.

The *Attitude Scale* was a pre- and post-assessment of parent attitudes toward their children using 14 items from the Aggression factor of the *Becker Bipolar Adjective Checklist* (Eyeberg & Johnson, 1974). The Aggression factor was selected because of its relationship to child problems most often reported by AFDC mothers (Brown, Cunningham, Birkimer, & Stutts, 1979). The checklist measured the parent's perception of both the child's perceived problem behaviors and general characteristics of the child.

Prior to training, all parents identified one or two specific problem behaviors exhibited by their children. Parents identifying two problem areas ranked them in order of severity, with Problem I being most serious and Problem II less serious. Pre-post ratings on problem behaviors were based on the 3-point *Rating Scale* according to how often the behaviors occurred (0 = never; 2 = often).

Process Measures

Three process measures were used to measure the parents' acquisition and implementation of the skill in the treatment group:

1. Understanding the material in the group was measured by two types of exercises. Discrimination exercises required the parents to recognize examples of the skill being taught in the group. Written exercises required the parents to produce correct examples of the skill being acquired.
2. Demonstration of the skill was measured through role playing.
3. Implementation of the skill was measured through written homework assignments.

Evaluation

The data collected during the course of the sessions indicated that training had a number of positive effects for this population of AFDC mothers. First, on the knowledge measure of parent-child communication and management skills (*Handling Problems Knowledge Test*), parents who attended more than two of the seven workshop sessions scored higher than both a similar group of AFDC mothers who received no training and those mothers who attended only one or two sessions. These scores indicated that low-income single parents can acquire knowledge of basic child management procedures through a parent group training program. The amount of time spent in group training seemed to be a critical variable in determining knowledge acquisition because parents who attended more sessions demonstrated greater knowledge of appropriate behaviors and skills than parents who attended one or two sessions, even though the latter group also had training manuals.

Second, the parents reported improvement in their children's behavior over the course of training. Of the problem behaviors identified at the first workshop session, 62% were rated as improved by the end of the 7 weeks of training, while 34% were rated as about the same and only 4% were rated as worse. It seems that training helped resolve many of the problems parents were having with their children's behavior in the home. Because parent attitudes toward children showed no change over the course of training, it seems that the change in rating of problem behaviors was due to actual behavior change rather than to parents viewing their children in a more positive manner.

Finally, social service workers reported that no children of parents involved in the training had to be removed from the home during the treatment period. It

seems that participation in the group helped the parents cope more effectively with their children in the home setting. The social service staff who led the groups were generally enthusiastic about the program and consequently adapted parts of the program for use in training parents of adolescents.

Several factors that occurred may have contributed to the results of the training. First, there was a significant relationship between the written exercises in which parents were required to produce examples of the skill being taught and the *Handling Problems Knowledge Test* (r = .79). Written exercises helped to ensure that parents understood the child management procedures before applying them in role playing and home settings.

Second, the data gathered on the participants seem to indicate that training probably should continue for a minimum of six or seven sessions. Although parents who attended training at least one or two times showed a somewhat higher level of knowledge of parent-child communication and child management skills than parents who received no training, they did not score as well as those parents who attended three or more group sessions.

Third, parent attitudes and perceptions of their children's behaviors often follow change in parents' cognitive behavior. Several studies (O'Dell, 1974; Worland, Carney, & Milich, 1977) have suggested that although knowledge of child management procedures may increase immediately as a result of training, it may take longer for parents' attitudes and perceptions to change accordingly. It may be that 7 weeks was not enough time to change parents' perceptions of their children's behaviors and general characteristics, as measured by the *Rating Scale* and the *Attitude Scale*.

Because child management procedures were introduced sequentially, some procedures (e.g., time-out) were not taught until the fifth or sixth week. The short time interval between training and final evaluation (1-2 weeks) may not have allowed parents enough time to observe the effects of specific child management procedures (e.g., time-out) on their children's behavior (e.g., aggression). Thus, an insufficient amount of time passed to allow parents to develop more positive attitudes toward their children's behaviors and general characteristics. A follow-up assessment might have indicated positive changes in parent attitudes, as well as retention of acquired knowledge of child management procedures. A lack of funds prevented the investigators from conducting follow-up procedures.

Conclusion

The combination of a variety of teaching modes (training manual, written exercises, videotape models, and role playing), coordinated through a group

approach to training, seems to be an effective method for training AFDC mothers in basic parenting skills. Feedback from participants indicated that the group provided (a) a means for developing a support system from which friendships developed, (b) concrete suggestions for handling problems with their children, and (c) positive reinforcement for their role as parents. As such, the training helped them manage more effectively in their role as single parents.

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Helping Latchkey Children: A Group Guidance Approach

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The term *latchkey* refers to children who are left at home alone or in the care of an under-age sibling for a significant portion of the day (Long & Long, 1984). These school-age children between 5 and 13 years old usually spend 2 to 3 hours on most days in self-care arrangements. They prepare themselves for school on mornings when their parents have left for work, or they come home after school to an empty house and wait for their parents to arrive home from work. They are named latchkey children because many carry their house keys on a string or chain around their necks.

The exact number of latchkey children is unavailable. It has been estimated, however, that about 6.5 million American children are currently in this category; by 1990 there may be 18 million (Scofield & Page, 1983).

Several societal and familial trends have led to the increase in unsupervised children. The rise in the number of single-parent families (Bundy & Gumaer, 1984) creates situations in which adequate adult supervision of children becomes difficult. The increase in the number of working mothers (Levitan & Belous, 1981) and the necessity of dual wage earners for many families (Waldman, 1983) create situations in which parents are unable to be with their children when they arrive home from school. The changing residences by many American families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984) contributes to the rise in the number of children who are home alone. As the mobility of families increases, it is less likely that grandparents or other relatives can be available to provide child care assistance.

Given the current trends in family structures and patterns of family lifestyles, it is reasonable to assume that more and more school-age children will be spending time in self-care or in the care of another under-age child on a regular basis. It is appropriate to ask: "What effect does being home alone have on children?"

Impact of Self-Care Arrangements on Children

School counselors and others are aware of the growing number of children left regularly without adult supervision before or after school. Although research on

the impact of self-care arrangements on children is limited, children will talk with counselors about their positive and negative feelings regarding being at home alone. Most children in late childhood tend to enjoy the responsibility of being on their own after school rather than being in the charge of a baby sitter (Long & Long, 1984). It is a normal expectation of late childhood for children to seek independence from family and adults and to desire the companionship of peers (Gumaer, 1984).

Researchers are finding negative consequences, however, when children are left without adult supervision. Studies have reported that children who are in self-care arrangements for regular periods of time tend to report high levels of worry and fear (Long & Long, 1984; Strother, 1984; Zill, 1983). From interviews with latchkey children, Long and Long (1984) found that children who routinely care for themselves experienced more fear than did children who were supervised by adults. The fear most often mentioned was that someone might break into their homes while they were alone and hurt them. They also reported being worried or afraid of noises in the dark, fire, losing their house keys, and severe weather. In the National Survey of Children conducted by Temple University in 1976, it was found that children who are routinely left in self-care are more fearful than are those who receive adult supervision (Strother, 1984).

Feelings of loneliness and boredom are often experienced by children who spend regular amounts of time alone at home (Long & Long, 1984). When children go straight home after school and are not allowed to have friends over to play, they develop symptoms of loneliness and boredom. The long, lonely hours spent at home without others produce stress and anxiety in children (Long & Long, 1983).

Another effect of self-care on children whose parents cannot be with them before or after school seems to be that of diminished performance in school work (Robinson, 1983; Strother, 1984). In a review of three studies, Strother (1984) found that children in self-care situations tended to have lower academic achievement than did children whose parents were not employed full time and could spend time with them. Moreover, there is a clear indication that school grades drop when children are given the responsibility for care of younger siblings (Smith, 1984).

Garbarino (1980), however, suggested that children who are regularly left unsupervised in the suburbs fare better than do those in the city. In a study of children from a rural setting, Galambos and Garbarino (1983) compared supervised and unsupervised children using teacher ratings and found no significant differences in their level of fear, school adjustment, classroom orientation, or academic achievement. Because this study was conducted in an environment that was less threatening than the urban settings of others (Long & Long, 1984;

Smith, 1984; Strother, 1984), there seems to be some indication that the neighborhood of latchkey children has an influence on their level of fear and their school performance.

Parent-child communication is often hindered by self-care arrangements. Long and Long (1984) found that some children will persuade their parents to allow them time to stay home alone so they will seem mature and responsible to both peers and parents. When they develop difficulties or begin to worry about situations that arise when home alone, however, they are reluctant to talk with their parents about those problems. Children tend to withhold sharing their worries because they think parents will make other child care arrangements or because they wish to protect their parents from further worries (Long & Long, 1984).

The special demands made on children when they are without adult supervision increase stress for many of them. Elkind (1981) has argued that latchkey children are expected to take on too much responsibility for their age. These youngsters tend to develop a higher rate of depression and personality problems during adolescence or later in life than do their peers. Because latchkey children are being expected to assume more responsibility for the care of their siblings or themselves, there seems to be a strong need to give these children more comprehensive instruction in survival skills (Long & Long, 1983).

Being in Charge: A Curriculum Response

"Being in Charge" is a guidance unit designed to provide intermediate and middle grade children with the skills to cope more effectively with taking care of themselves while home alone. A basic assumption of the program is that each child will periodically experience self-care situations at some point in time; consequently, all children can benefit from exposure to the program. Furthermore, a central theme of the activities addresses the age-appropriate need for children to become independent of parents and to develop confidence by gaining more control of their lives. The program was written to be used in a developmental guidance curriculum. In addition to developing self-care survival skills, each of the six sessions has a homework component that encourages parent involvement and fosters parent-child communication.

Format of Each Session

Each session contains four phases: warmup, review of homework, presentation of the skill, and assignment of homework.

1. The warmup phase is designed to set the frame of reference for the group session by asking students to complete such sentence stems as "When I am alone at home, I feel . . ." and share them with the group.
2. The review of homework stage is designed to encourage children to talk with their parents about the material and issues related to each session.
3. The activity phase helps students develop specific skills for being in charge when parents are away. At this point, the group members participate in carefully designed activities such as role playing, creating mental images, brainstorming, and group discussions.
4. In the final activity of each session, the assigning of homework, each student is asked to take home the material presented in the meeting and discuss it with his or her parents.

Objective and Content for Each Session

Being in Charge was written to be presented in six 45-minute sessions. The following is an outline of the objectives and content for each session of the program.

Session 1: Introduction. Students are told the purpose and given an overview of the program. They also develop a combined list of their existing home rules and current responsibilities when home alone.

Session 2: Setting up a self-care arrangement. A model is presented, showing how children should work with their parents to set up their self-care arrangement (e.g., finding a contact person, establishing routine communication, and determining special home rules and responsibilities).

Session 3: Personal safety when home alone. During this session, students rehearse ways of safely answering the door and telephone when home alone. Group discussion focuses on the reasons for each of the safety tips that are listed on specially developed handouts.

Session 4: Emergency and non-emergency situations. Group discussion focuses on helping children distinguish between emergency and non-emergency situations. Role-playing activities help students practice emergency action procedures.

Session 5: Special problems of being in charge. Group members brainstorm ways to overcome boredom and loneliness when home alone. A group discussion generates tips for coping with worries and fears.

Session 6: Other topics for being in charge. Role-playing activities help students practice ways to talk with their parents about concerns and problems that arise while home alone. Tips are provided to help students learn how to take care of younger children.

During each session special handouts are provided that give suggestions and tips relating to the topic under discussion. For example, one handout outlines how to make an emergency telephone call. The counselor asks students to take each handout home and discuss it with their parents. Because parent involvement and promotion of parent-child communication are goals of the program, this request of students is made under the guise of homework. Thus, the time set aside during each session to review the homework assignment is really an opportunity for the counselor to encourage children to talk with their parents about Being in Charge activities. The program stresses that parent support is vital if children wish to assume new responsibilities and to cope safely with being at home alone. In fact, parents are notified by letter of the classroom meetings that focus on being alone at home and are urged to discuss the program materials with their children each night after the sessions.

Program Evaluation

To determine the effectiveness of the program, we conducted field tests in an urban elementary school with a K–6 student population. The program was conducted by the senior author, who is a certified elementary school counselor.

Participants

Five classes of students, two sixth grades (n = 50) and three fifth grades (n = 65), were the participants. This included all the students in those two grades. The students were heterogeneously grouped in each grade by the school principal so that each class would have equal numbers of able and less able students. Approximately 22% of the students were from single-parent homes, and 25% of the students reported being home on a regular basis without adult supervision. Socioeconomic level of the population was generally middle to lower class, and the racial composition was approximately 13% Black, 4% Asian, and 83% White.

Design

One class at each grade level was randomly selected to receive the treatment first (n = 48), with the remaining classes serving as control classes (n = 67). The design called for pretesting all fifth- and sixth-grade students, presenting the program only to the treatment class at each grade level while the control classes continued their regular activities, posttesting all classes (Posttest 1), presenting the program to the control classes, and posttesting the control classes after their

exposure to the treatment (Posttest 2). In addition, a retention test was administered approximately 5 months later to all available students who had participated in the program. When the retention test was administered to students the following September, the sixth-grade participants had matriculated to the junior high school, so the retention test was administered by personnel at that school.

Instruments

The test was an 18-item cognitive test on program content. All items were multiple choice with four possible answers. Readability of the written test was assessed by a certified reading teacher to be at the third-grade level. Test items were presented in a different order on the posttest than they were on the pretest. Response options for each question were also rearranged. Test scores were corrected for guessing before statistical analysis was done.

A 13-item parent questionnaire was used in the fall to assess parents' perceptions of the children's behavior when home without adult supervision and the parents' feelings about such situations. Questionnaires were received for 38 of 50 former fifth-grade participants who were still enrolled in the same school in the fall.

Results

Mean scores (corrected) are shown in Figure 1 for all testings. The numbers of students for whom paired scores were available for analysis over the various time periods differ because of absentees and withdrawals from the school. There was a significant difference between gains (corrected for guessing) of treatment and control groups between the pretest and Posttest 1 using a paired t test (t = 12.38, df = 113, $p < .001$). Comparison of scores (again corrected for guessing) for the control students for Posttest 1 and Posttest 2 showed the average increase of 5.21 to be significant (t = 17.48, df = 54, $p < .001$). Thus, the test results showed that participation in the program seemed to be responsible for increasing students' knowledge of self-care practices.

Comparison of the posttreatment and retention scores (corrected for guessing) for all students (treatment and control) for whom paired scores could be obtained showed only a slight decay in scores (–.51) from the posttreatment mean of 16.53 to the retention mean of 16.02 (t = 2.17, df = 69, $p < .017$). This change occurred over a period of approximately 5 months, in which there was no planned reinforcement administered by the counselor.

According to parent perceptions recorded on the parent questionnaires, most of the children kept the door locked (89%), answered the telephone (88%), did not admit to strangers that there was no adult home (85%), and did answer the

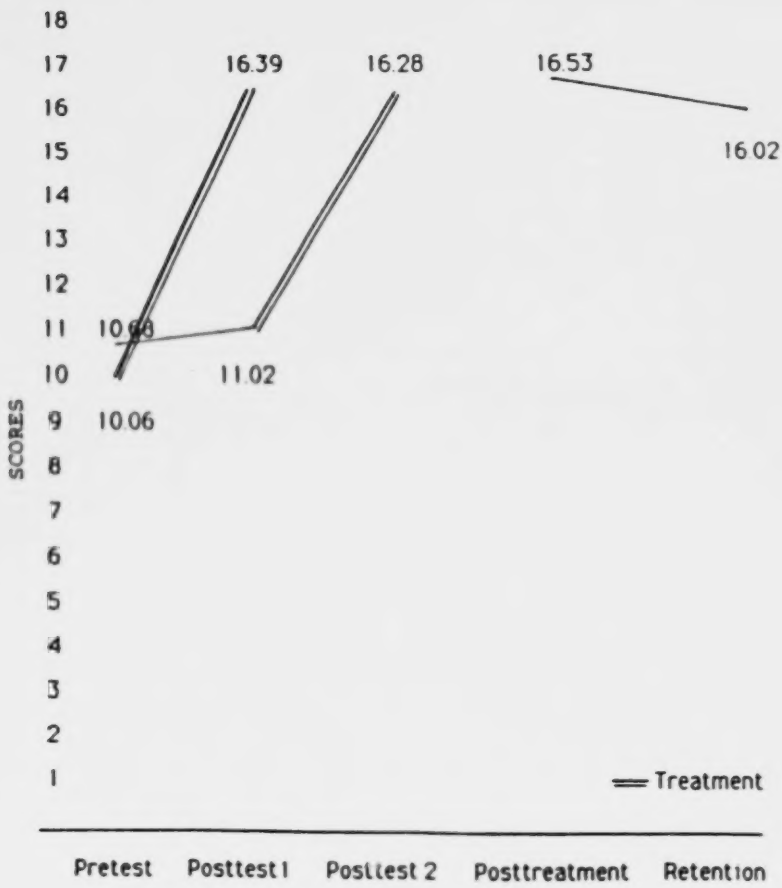

Figure 1
Change in Mean Scores Across Time

door (72%) but kept it closed when doing so (93%) when home without an adult. Most homes (92%) had a list of special telephone numbers by the telephone, and parents thought the children knew in what circumstances to use the various numbers (92%). All except 11% believed that the child felt more confident about staying home without adult supervision since having the program,

and all except one parent reported feeling more comfortable personally about the child's ability to take care of himself or herself since completing the program.

Discussion and Conclusion

The program conducted by the school counselor was designed to increase children's knowledge about how to set up a self-care arrangement and what to do when home alone or with siblings when there was no adult present. The children became more knowledgeable about the procedures they should use, and the knowledge stayed with them over the summer. The parents who responded to the survey indicated more confidence in their children's skills in taking care of themselves after completing the program.

Incidental evidence of the program's impact was provided when a teacher told the counselor of an occasion on which a call to a student's home was necessary. The call was answered by a fifth grader who was alone and who had participated in the Being in Charge program. When the teacher asked to speak to the child's mother, the reply was: "I'm sorry, but my mother cannot come to the phone now. May I take a message?" This is the precise statement role played in the program.

Extensive training is not necessary for school counselors to implement this program successfully. School counselors in two different school systems used the program with students in Grades 3-8 after attending only a brief orientation session on the program and using the program materials and resources. Although adaptations were made to fit their respective time schedules and there was no validation that the program was followed, the students in all groups made posttest gains on the written test that were similar to gains in the original research.

It is important that school counselors implement programs such as Being in Charge. During the group sessions of this program, children tended to express strong emotions about times when their parents were away from home and they were in charge. In situations that require processing of affect, the skills and experience of a trained counselor are needed to help children work through their feelings. Furthermore, the school counselor is able to help children develop confidence about being at home alone and to help children recognize when they should seek help from stresses and worries that arise from being unsupervised at home.

As society continues to change the ways in which its children are reared, greater demands will be placed on children. The role of the school counselor becomes increasingly vital in helping schools and parents to become more

effective in meeting the changing needs of children. The Being in Charge program is evidence of one such effort.

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Strategic Interventions with Children of Single-Parent Families

Wade Lewis

Single-parent families have rapidly become a way of American life. During the past two decades, the number of families consisting of at least one child and one biological parent has doubled, and single-parent families are increasing at a rate 2 1/2 times that for families with a husband and wife (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981; Smith, 1980). Unfortunately, the fields of psychology and counseling have seemingly not kept pace with the emerging prevalence of single-parent families. It is encouraging to note, however, the increased concern with the unique structural, organizational, and developmental aspects of these families, which has correspondingly enlarged the range of effective interventions.

This article focuses on the school-related problems of children of single-parent families. A way of conceptualizing such problems from a family systems perspective is presented, as well as examples of interventions based on strategic family therapy (Haley, 1976; Madanes, 1980).

Social Context of Children's Problems

When a school counselor is requested to intervene because of a child's disruptive classroom behavior, defiant attitude toward teacher authority, physical aggression with peers, or repeated academic failure, there are obviously numerous ways of viewing how the problem developed. One way of conceptualizing a problem is to examine its social context and to assume that the problem has occurred in relation to the behavior and actions of others. From this perspective, all behavior in a particular context is interrelated and each behavior provides both a cue for the next behavior as well as feedback for the preceding behavior. Thus, behavior operates in a circular fashion and social systems such as families consist of repetitive sequences of action (Haley, 1976).

Translating systems theory into a pragmatic framework for understanding school-related problems involves emphasis on one point: When faced with a difficult child, a thorough analysis of the familial system must occur before a means of intervening is determined. As the primary social determinants of a child's behavior, the family's structure, hierarchical organization, and genera-

tional boundaries must be assessed. This does not mean that the solution to all school-related problems is to be found in a family-oriented intervention, but this system should certainly be the initial area of investigation with severe or chronic problems and extremely abrupt changes in children's behavior.

Basic Systemic Assumptions

Several systemic concepts must be kept in mind when designing interventions for children of single-parent families. Hierarchy refers to the way a family is organized so that there is an order that describes who is in charge of whom and who has power over whom. For example, it is assumed that a single parent must be effectively in charge of a child, rather than the child possessing power over the parent, for the family to function effectively. Misbehavior, however, often allows a child to control actions of the parent and essentially puts the child in charge of the parent (Haley, 1976).

Boundaries are the family rules that define who participates in what, and how (Minuchin, 1974). Boundaries help a family organize into an effective hierarchy by delineating areas of responsibility, action, decision making, and privacy. Thus, it is assumed that a single-parent family must have a clear generational boundary between parent and child. This boundary allows each party to recognize the needs and tasks of the other. It is also assumed that unclear or diffuse boundaries and repeatedly crossing or intruding established boundaries often result in symptomatic behavior (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974).

Another example of crossing boundaries is the formation of coalitions, alliances established by two people who occupy different positions in the hierarchy and therefore different levels of responsibility and power. Coalitions may result in the "perverse triangle," in which two people of different status join together against a third person (Haley, 1976). This arrangement may often result in behavioral problems. A prevalent example is when a parent and child form a coalition against a teacher, which undermines the teacher's authority. Likewise, a teacher and child may form a coalition against a single parent with similar results.

Systems theory also describes behavior as operating in a circular fashion. Symptoms or behavioral problems involve repetitive sequences of interaction that must be interrupted for the family system to evolve to a higher, symptom-free level of functioning (Hoffman, 1981). This interactional view indicates the importance of understanding what occurs before and after the behavior is presented. Altering the precipitants and consequences of the behavior is an important therapeutic strategy.

Protective Function of Symptoms

There is another systemic concept that is especially important. Madanes (1980) has described how a child's problem may serve a protective or helpful function in a family. This premise is particularly relevant to single-parent families, which may have been abruptly formed because of divorce, death, or abandonment and which are suddenly confronted with personal, economic, social, and developmental hardships. In such cases, a child's problem may induce a parent to maintain self-control and temporarily put personal problems aside so that he or she can focus on helping the child. Parents are helped or protected by the child's problem because "it provides a respite from the parents' own troubles and a reason to overcome their own difficulties" (Madanes, 1980, p. 66).

In a single-parent family, the helpfulness of the child's problem may be very specific: A child may refuse to go to school so the parent does not have to face looking for a job; the parent of a failing student may stay home evenings to help with schoolwork and, thus, not have to deal with developing social activities and forming new relationships; a child's conflicts with the teacher may cause the parent to be angry with the teacher rather than be depressed over a recent divorce. The systemic approach, therefore, examines what the function of a symptom may be and, in particular, looks at how the problem may be helpful to or protective of another person.

Strategic Interventions

From this family systems perspective, there are a number of strategic interventions a school counselor may choose to use with children of single-parent families:

Reframing requests for participation. The parent may be asked during the first interview to help the school solve the child's problem. It is emphasized that the parent is the only true expert regarding the child, and the school needs this special expertise. The school counselor must use every opportunity to emphasize the parent's competence. Blaming the parent in any way for the child's problem will probably result in poorer functioning by the parent, thereby increasing the need for the child to misbehave or fail as a way of further protecting the parent. This simple tactic also clearly places the parent in charge of the child, draws an appropriate generational boundary, and establishes an effective hierarchy.

Describing the nature and extent of parental responsibilities. To ensure consistency and cooperation among the "helpers," the teacher, therapist, and parent should agree on a specific plan designed to solve the presenting problem. Each person's part must be clearly defined, and the limits of responsibility for

the parent are particularly important. If a parent is to help the child complete unfinished classwork each evening, a limit must be placed on the length of time the parent will assist the child. If disruptive classroom behavior is to be managed with both a consequence at school and another consequence at home (such as no television), then the exact details of these consequences must be prescribed. It is essential that all parts of the "helper system" function together in a supportive manner to avoid covert coalitions. The parent must also be appropriately put in charge of the child's problem to establish a correct hierarchy. As such, the nature and extent of the parent's involvement must be carefully determined and monitored.

Encouraging age-appropriate activities for the child. The school counselor may suggest that the child is at least partially experiencing problems because of underdeveloped social skills with peers or not enough physical activities for the child's energy or mental outlets for the child's abilities. The counselor may encourage the parent to seek specific age-appropriate extracurricular activities for the child. This intervention also interjects appropriate distance into the parent-child relationship and establishes a functional hierarchy within the family. The child's involvement with peers is also increased while the child's involvement in the parent's life is decreased, which strengthens appropriate generational boundaries.

Encouraging appropriate parent activities. By emphasizing the importance of the parent in solving the child's problem, the school counselor may encourage the parent to pursue social and physical activities, particularly those involving peers, as a way of "maintaining your energy and motivation and recharging your batteries." This approach of taking care of oneself in order to help the child may direct the parent into those pursuits that had previously been avoided. Such involvement should improve the parent's adjustment, increase the support network, decrease the need for protection, and strengthen generational boundaries.

Removing the function of the problem. The counselor may make the function of the problem a consequence for its occurrence. For example, if a child's misbehavior in school keeps the parent overinvolved and distracted from making social contacts, the parent may be directed to go out twice during the weekend instead of once when the child misbehaves. The explanation may be that the parent will require this extra rest and relaxation to have the energy necessary to manage the child's misbehavior. Thus, the repetitive sequence of parent-child interaction has been changed and the helpfulness of the problem removed. Instead of helping the parent to avoid something, the problem now causes it to occur.

Prescribing other nonsymptomatic ways of being helpful. The counselor may state that the child has a need to be helpful to the parent and elicit suggestions as to what other ways help may be provided. It is best, however, not to

describe openly the child's problem as an attempt to be helpful. From these suggestions, an age-appropriate means of help is selected and a ritual prescribed whereby both parent and child participate. It may be decided that the child will read a story to the parent every day at 4:00 p.m., after which they will have milk and cookies together. This ritual will bring the parent and child together for an event other than the problem and give the child a means of being helpful without presenting a problem.

Summary

A family systems model provides a clear and useful way of perceiving the school problems presented by children of single-parent families. The techniques briefly outlined in this article have been used alone and in various combinations with both elementary and junior high school students. The use of such systems-oriented interventions may result in rapid change and effective short-term therapy, the goals of any school counselor. A more elaborate and difficult strategy to implement, which is applicable to the interventions presented here, is the pretending technique (Madanes, 1980). Counselors experienced in family therapy are referred to Madanes's work for a thorough description of this technique.

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Chapter 2
Counseling Issues in a World of Changing Families

Issues for elementary school counselors to consider about a world of changing families:

1. You are a new counselor in an elementary school where single parent families are common. What can you do to meet some of the special needs of the children from these families?
2. What topics would you want to include in a divorce group for third and fourth grade students? How would you determine the effectiveness of your group?
3. You are counseling a student who has been consistently disruptive in class. During a counseling session the student begins to cry and tells you that she doesn't know what to do about her parents getting a divorce. What would you do to help this student?
4. How might an elementary school counselor initiate a divorce group for parents? What topics should be included in the divorce group sessions?
5. What is unique about the multimodal approach to divorce groups for children?
6. A teacher informs you that a student from a single parent family has had problems completing class assignments. This student has typically been conscientious, but since his parents' divorce, he has not been getting his work done. What specific interventions would you use to assist the child?
7. What role should elementary school counselors have in family counseling?
8. How can elementary school counselors help latchkey children deal with the lonely hours they spend at home?
9. When parents divorce, some children feel that they have been abandoned. How might elementary school counselors help children who feel abandoned and who lack self-esteem?